

A Memoir by Agatha “Peggy” Sellinger

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Memories of Years Past

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Going back over the years, as I remember it, so many changes have taken place and it is hard to visualize that new technology can be the cause or reason for it all. Each year something new comes along and almost impossible to keep up with it. Who would have ever thought they would land a man on the moon!

In the twenties the threshing machine was the big invention and it worked for the pioneers that emigrated at the turn of the century. Horses were used and it took longer to get the work done, but they managed. Now they invented the combine and bigger tractors, and they can do acres and acres of land in a short time. The combines have radios in them and are air-conditioned to keep heat and dust out. What comfort! They do not realize the bigger the operation the more machinery and more money they need, and in the eighties with no rain and poor crop, money has run out and many farmers have lost their farms.

In those days people were glad to have a meal made of flour, which was almost a steady diet for survival. If it would not have been for a garden to help them along they would have struggled more. Then when the drought came in the thirties food and clothing were brought in from the East and people were thankful for what they received. Most of the women were able to sew so the clothing received was made over into new clothes. Good old Robin Hood and Five Roses flour bags were used for making clothes, tea towels and other clothing and they really stood the wear and tear. The women were excellent cooks so they could make up dishes that pulled them through hard times. I know we never complained if we had the same food for a few days. We always hoped it would get better down the road, and it did. People did not throw out a thing, everything was used that they could use.

They had very hard and rough times. Listening to some of the stories from our parents it was not easy and they were not alone. I remember our mother talking about her home in Kronau, having to haul grain when twelve years old and handle horses, and having to harrow when still so young. One day she had to take us along while she had to do the stoking, and I am sure we were not always on our best behavior. In those days many women had to help outside plus their own chores around the house, but they managed and never complained. She often mentioned and laughed about it, when dad hooked a little wagon behind the binder, with Amelia (3) and John (1) on it, while she was stoking, and they would fall off and dad would keep on going, not realizing they were not on the wagon. After a while he missed them and had to go back and pick them up, both crying and hanging on to each other. He never did that again.

As we grew up, I remember Amelia, Mary and I going stoking with a lunch pail in hand containing cucumbers, salt shaker, bread and water and every so often we had to sit behind a stook and indulge in these goodies. We may not have put up too many stooks but it was a long day so we probably did a good day's work. After Amelia left to work in Regina, Mary and I still had to help and we would wear big gloves to go stoking and

wherever holes were worn through the wheat tops would be very prickly and we would get sores. Our legs were often scratched from the stubble, even though we wore boots. That wasn't bad enough, when we got back to the house other chores had to be done, like fetching the cows and taking them half a mile down the pasture to water them. Once that was done we had to do the milking and then separate the milk. We never liked the cleaning up after but it had to be clean for the next day. This was a neat process but it still puzzles me to this day how the milk and cream separates. During these times we weren't the only ones that had to do heavy work, but we had to help out and thankful we had the health and strength to do it.

During the thirties when the crops were very poor and there were no stooks, dad attached a box to the side of the binder and I had to stand in the box and push the cuttings off when the row came up. I used to be so tired by 8 o'clock at night that I thought my arms would fall off. I was about thirteen years old and not very strong. Then 5 o'clock came early when I would get on Queenie, our horse, and bring in the cows and have to help with the milking.

For the stoves in those days, they used manure which was spread out and packed. When it was dry it would be cut into blocks and used. We also used to gather up hundreds of cow chips from the pastures which were also dried and used. Another ritual, was to get green poplar poles from across Last Mountain Lake, at Strasburg, so our dad, brother John, uncles and cousins would leave early in the morning with a couple of sleighs. Many times they would run into terrible snow storms and we hoped and prayed they got home safe before it got too dark. It was a relief when we heard the rustling of the harness and crunching of the snow. They would go when the ice was good and hand. We also used a lot of coal and that they got early in the fall before the snow came.

Food commodities such as flour and sugar were bought in 100 lb. bags and always bought enough to last the winter. Even peanut butter was bought in large pails and we would go through several of those by spring.

Pot-bellied stoves were used in the living room and would be banked with coal before going to bed and most of the time lasted until early in the morning. Sometimes it would turn cold, especially when no one woke up during the night to add more coal. The old cook stoves were the best. They baked the best bread which was made in a big basin, or one made of wood. The dough was made the night before and wrapped up in blankets to keep warm. This way the baking was done early in the morning. There was nothing better than coming home after school and smell that aroma of bread. We would indulge in at least two slices with good farm butter and some Rogers or Lily White syrup, either bread, kaze kuchen (cheese) or cinnamon buns. She often made something else we all liked and those were Pladchantas filled with pumpkin or apple (this is more like a turnover).

We only lived half a mile from Two Tree Point School so came home most of the time for our lunch, unless weather was bad, then the parents came and got us. There was always a bunch of us, as four families lived close together – the Selinger colony as we were called (Ralph, Leo, George, and Philip). During the summer we would eat our lunch in a hurry so we could get back to school and play ball or Anti-I-Over before the bell would ring. I remember one incident in school, during the winter, when our teacher could not get the furnace working. It was real cold when we arrived, and the school was blue with smoke so in order to keep warm we all started chasing each other around the desks until the teacher came in unexpectedly and put an end to it. It did warm us up.

Our school was called Two Tree Point School and often wondered how it got its name. I understand the name came from two trees standing at a point down by Long Lake. We only lived two miles from the lake. It was busy place especially during the summer when people would drive miles to the beach. I was never a water lover, and could not swim so did not rush to the beach on a Sunday. Yet some of the cousins and my brother would walk the two miles and thought it was nothing. I often enjoyed my afternoon, lying behind the house, keeping cool, and watching the clouds move along and see what images they would come from. Clouds fascinate me.

We also played ball a lot and had teams made up so recess could not come fast enough to carry on where we left off. I guess we needed the practice. In those days they had picnics or Sports Days and people looked forward to them. Most of the schools had boys and girls teams and they would travel to different towns. We had a team which I thought was pretty good and were made up of Selingers, Dielschneiders only and then later we added Hoffarts and Lloyds. We had a lot of fun and won on many occasions. We used to go by horse and buggy when people did not have cars.

There was also a time at our school we had a small garden plot that we had to look after. We had to weed it and keep it looking nice so I worked hard at it as prizes were awarded when fall rolled around. I was thrilled when I was among some of the winners. Gardening is not my forte, but Mary is a much better gardener although I love to work outside.

When my dad, Ralph, Uncle Leo and Uncle Philip were still young they used to have baseball games, mostly on Sundays, in our Uncle George's pasture. People from around the community would gather and make up teams and have a real afternoon of fun. Friends would stay after and visit, which was a day well spent.

Our mother was a good seamstress so she would try and make us clothes that we picked from the Eaton's Catalogue. She did not disappoint us and they looked very much to what we ordered. We were always proud to have something new. We all learned to sew but I never did as well as Amelia or Mary. I had to tackle something I think I would be able to do it. We can all knit, tat, crochet, plus other hobbies we picked up in later years.

Washing clothes in the twenties and thirties was quite a chore and took a lot of strength and energy. The whole load of wash had to be done on a washboard in a tub. It was a back-breaking job. Looking back, you wondered how those women ever managed it week after week or almost every day where there was a big family. I experienced that myself as most young girls had to help along with the housework. At least not as much water was used as they do now, and the wash was much whiter too. There was no place to hang your wash either, so the outdoor line was it. When you brought it in, especially during the winter, it would stand up on its own. It was frozen so stiff, but in a few minutes it would limber up.

Threshing time in the fall was a big adventure for us younger children (guess all the commotion and people around intrigued us). The crew would go from one farmer to another until they were finished. They would hire men to pitch bundles and would stay on each farm in caboose as they moved along. The only burden to a farmer would be when it rained and they had to feed them three meals a day, maybe for two or three days. This meant a lot of work for the women, making meals for as many as eight extra people, besides keeping up their own chores. Many times we had to dig in and help as there was no end to work. No one stayed up late as you had to be up early to do some chores and get

meals ready. There was always a lunch too that had to be taken out to the crew, in the fields, when they were working morning and afternoons. School usually did not start until the 15th of September so the children could help along and give a hand.

When crops did not appear to be as good some years they did not get hired help, so John and the cousins had to help with threshing and pitch bundles. Mary was home at that time and was not very old (but tall) so she would help John. He would load the rack as high as he could (he was not that strong either) and Mary would get to the top and place them so he could get more on and then take them to the threshing machine. It was heavy work but everybody had to help. I also helped when I was home.

October was usually butchering time so two or three people would get together and slaughter as many animals as were required for the winter. This was an all day session and would go well into the evening. The blood, from the pigs, was saved for blood sausage, so someone had to stir it until it was cool, to prevent coagulation. The intestines were cleaned and scraped and used as casings for sausages. Pork was cut up and cured. The good fat was rendered for cooking and baking. The poorer brand was used to make soap (good lye soap). Head cheese was made besides other ways of using up the meat. Hardly a thing was wasted. Hams, Bacon and sausages were smoked so they would keep for the winter and into the spring. In those earlier days there were not refrigerators, as they have now, so they had to hang food down the wells to cool. You had to be careful how you pulled up the pail or you food landed up at the bottom of the well. The cold winters then helped a lot and food could be kept outside.

Beef, chickens, and fish were canned to preserve them and would last all winter and longer. Roasts, steaks and pork chop were cut up and packed in layers of snow in barrels or in ice houses, where it would freeze and keep. During the summer some people had iceboxes. They would cut up blocks of ice in the spring and this would last for sometime and they could keep food that way.

Some people shipped cream; others made butter and sold it or traded it for groceries. Eggs were also sold and got as little as 10 cents a dozen, butter wasn't much more.

For medicinal purposes a good remedy of molasses and sulphur was used. People were great believers in this and would not be without. When you had a cold, mustard plasters were used also goose grease was spread on your chest and back. You also could steam yourself with a tea kettle, being careful not to have it too hot. This remedy is still used and does help but some people think it is too old fashioned. If you stay with it for a day or so, it is much better than some new medicines they prescribe these days. A bread poultice was also used on many occasions for boils and festered sores.

Oatmeal was a healthy breakfast and we had it often. The oatmeal we get now just does not taste like it used to, at least I do not think it does. Maybe it was the way our mother prepared it. They say it sticks to the ribs! I also remember my parents roasting barley in the oven, and grinding it for coffee. It did not taste bad and I preferred it to the ordinary coffee and really got to liking it.

Evening hours on the farm were taken up with reading, listening to radio and many hours of playing some instrument. Many relatives could play violin, accordion and other instruments. We had a lot of cousins that could play several instruments. School dances used to be very popular and everybody would go, even the children, and it was nothing to see them in a corner sleeping waiting for the dance to end. People in the area would supply

the music and everybody would have a great time. Our dad used to play the violin and we all learned to play it. We also had a guitar and learned to chord and we would sing and harmonize and the evenings went quickly. John took more interest in the guitar and still plays it. Amelia was always interested in the piano and in later years took it up again. I have given up on the violin because of my arthritic fingers in my left hand.

Hockey time was never forgotten on a Saturday night. We got to know all the players on the team, at least the names. There were only six teams and all were very good, quite a contrast now with twenty-one or more teams. Another Saturday night pleaser was the Grand Ole Opry with Lullabelle and Scotty from Nashville and all the other entertainers.

During the thirties, the Great Depression, I remember the terrible dust storms that came up so quickly that at times you could not see the sun. Ditches and sides of the roads were filled with silt, painting a pretty picture of ripples. We also experienced thunderstorms that spewed fork lightning from a rainless sky that shook the house and one would run for cover. This would continue for some time and not a drop of rain. The house would be so filled with dust that it was almost impossible to clean.

During the drought gophers and grasshoppers were so bad that gophers were poisoned with strychnine poison mixed with grain and put in every hole. We would also catch them by carrying pails of water, pouring it down the hole to make them come out and we would get 1 or 2 cents a tail. Big deal! We would spend hours at this for a few cents but 25 cents was a lot of money to us in the thirties. Grasshoppers were also poisoned. During harvest time they would move in, in gray clouds, settling on everything and chew holes in anything they sat on plus binder twine. These times were very hard on all farmers who were struggling so hard to get ahead. People were proud and did not want handouts from the government, but there came a time when relief was most welcome and food, clothes, apples and dried salted cod fish were brought in from the East. The cod fish was not the most appetizing but people appreciated what they received. People grew gardens and hoped they would produce enough to get them through the years.

Some people had summer kitchens which we never had. It was built a short distance from the main house and used only during the summer. It certainly kept the main house clean and cool. The summer kitchen did attract flies but with fly coil and bottles of sugar water hanging around type were kept to a minimum. A screen door was a must in these days.

There were always geese on the farm. Their nice soft feathers were used for pillows and bed covers. At Christmas time it was a tradition to have a goose for dinner besides a turkey. The fat was always saved for medicinal and other uses after it was rendered down.

The early settlers had many hardships in every day living, poor medical facilities, not much money and had to work long hours to make ends meet. Extremely cold weather and blizzards, now as high as 12' was not unusual in the middle of the yard and 40 degrees below zero. At one time you could count on having snow before Halloween and out playing Fox and the Goose, a children's game, and have lots of snow until March. You invariably see that any more these days. Weather patterns have changed. Often times roads were impossible and blown shut so you could hardly see which way to go. There were not many cars especially in the winter, so horses and a sleigh or a bob-sleigh were used.

Christmas was always a special time and we looked forward to going to midnight mass at Holdfast. We were bundled up in a sleigh using warm bricks to keep our feet

warm. We finally got a caboose with a small stove in it so it was much warmer to travel. This was closed in and much warmer. We had 10 miles to go and took several hours to get there, and would not get home until the wee hours in the morning so it was a long night. The horses were put into a delivery stable and looked after.

There were good times and we did unusual things, for example, my sister Amelia, who was quite young at that time, ordered three pair of colored stocking for \$1.00. They had fads then too. She made up the order and laid it on the table. In the meantime mother and dad had made up an order for garden seeds for the spring. Instead of the seed order, dad picked up the other and when the parcel came here were these colored stockings. She did not get reprimanded but he just sent the order for the seeds without any hesitation. I remember when I was about 12 years old I sold some wax sweet peas which was something new at that time and several were doing it. I fancied these lovely blue glass beads so I got busy and sold them around the neighborhood. When I got them I was so excited and still wear them to this day. They are so authentic and you just don't see something like that any more. Amelia did the same and she got a box camera and if it wasn't for this camera we would not have all the pictures we have to day.

Roads were built using horses and scrapers and took days to finish a stretch. I remember them doing our road. Men lived in cabooses as they kept moving around from town to town. They would have cooks and supply three meals a day. Weather would be a factor at times as so often rain would delay their progress. What a change then and now where they use all big equipment and roads are built so much faster and better. Or are they?

It was difficult for teachers too. Salaries were very low. Four hundred dollars or even less was not unusual in those days as the tax payers could not afford to pay any more. They would help them out with food and whatever they had or could do for them.

Saskatoon berry picking was another event we looked forward to whenever our parents decided to go. This gave us a trip to Grandview Beach. There was a lovely beach here too but we had to pick berries so we did not do any sun-bathing. We canned as many berries as we could and during the winter months they sure tasted good. At that time we had our first Model T car which dad had bought at a sale. He dragged it home with a team of horses, fixed it up and we had a car. Our dad was a good mechanic too.

Living close to so many cousins made it very pleasant as we always had someone to play with. We just had to cross the road so we were never bored. We made our own entertainment. Kerosene lamp were the only light we had, and not too bright at times, so we found it very hard to do our homework. I remember our dad rigging up a motor and wires and suddenly we had light with a bulb. What an invention we thought, we just could not believe the improvement.

Having no water on the farm, we had to carry it and had to go to our Aunt Katie's well which was a little distance away. This was for our drinking water. Our well water was only good for the animals. We would carry two pails at a time so we would not have to go too often. We finally smartened up and trained our dog, Blackie, hitched him to the sleigh or wagon, put on a cream can and hauled water that way.

Doctors had a very tough time in those days. They had no cars then that could be driven in the winter so they had to use the horse and buggy and sleigh, on many occasions they just came on horse-back. I remember him coming to our place and because of a terrible storm he had to stay overnight and ventured out the next day. People were very

good that way and helped him out any way they could. If people could not pay him, he was willing to take produce in return.

The boys around the area all had a winter sport snaring rabbits and weasels, which were skinned and pelts dried then sold. They did not make very much but they caught them anyway. I remember John coming home one time with a skunk and he was in trouble. Mother would not let him into the house, so he had to go outside and change his clothes and go and bury old ones. He never did that again. We had many a rabbit stew, plus partridge stew and they were good. Don't know if I would care for them that much now.

One has to give credit to the early pioneers who had the courage to work hard, to get ahead and make this a better world to live in. They had so much faith and that kept them going otherwise many would not have been able to survive all the trials and tribulations they had to go through.